

	School of Health, Education, Applied Arts
	EINL 200
	CULTURE AND THE ACQUISITION OF LANGUAGE AND LITERACY
	FALL 2026
	Number of Credits: 3
Course Outline	

INSTRUCTOR: Norma Shorty, PhD

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Class dates: September 01 – December 08, 2026

Class time: Tuesday 9:00 AM to 11:50 AM

Classroom: A2712

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides students with an understanding and analysis of how culture influences the development of language, literacy, and communication skills, with a particular focus on the language experiences of Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

With the increasing number of Aboriginal school-aged children in the territory and the changing classroom demographics, teachers and other school professionals will benefit from a greater understanding of how culture affects language acquisition and development.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

2nd year standing or permission of instructor.

EQUIVALENCY OR TRANSFERABILITY

Receiving institutions determine course transferability. Find further information at:

<https://www.yukonu.ca/admissions/transfer-credit>

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to increase their understanding of, and in which ways:
 - Culture informs and shapes the learner,
 - Language, literacy, and communication competencies are developed within a cultural and community context,
 - Language acquisition is culturally biased and informed,
 - Certain cultures have been privileged in terms of language and literacy development.
- Have opportunities to increase their understanding and knowledge of:
 - how to teach language acquisition and literacy development within a culturally relevant and culturally rich context,
 - and what happens when the ties between language learning and culture have been severed.

COURSE FORMAT

This course is grounded in teachings, stories, and learning materials developed by and with Indigenous Elders and Indigenous Knowledge Holders (*Dene Kede*). Course materials, including instructor-developed presentations and land-based learning activities, support students in engaging respectfully with Indigenous perspectives on language, culture, literacy, and learning. Students are not expected to act as experts in Indigenous knowledge systems. Instead, students are expected to engage relationally, critically, and respectfully with the teachings shared throughout the course. Learning in this course emphasizes:

- relationship
- reflection
- land-based understanding
- story as knowledge
- relational accountability

A weekly breakdown of instructional hours

Instructional hours will include field activities, face-to-face learning activities, and peer teaching events. This course is expected to require up to 7 hours of additional coursework per week. It is important to note that the extra time is for your co-developed assignments with your group (by Teams, Google Meet, Zoom, or in person).

Delivery format

Classes will be lectures, demonstrations, videos, group exercises, student presentations, group discussions, Zoom, and some hands-on experiences. Students, please come prepared to contribute to all group discussions. EINL 200 will be taught within the context of truth and reconciliation.

EVALUATION

Participation – Working and contributing to your group and co-developing assignments, by engaging in in-class and group Zoom meetings and discussions, researching local culture and community connections, and final potluck	10	
Project 1 – Critically examine Truth and Reconciliation through the principles of the <i>Our Languages Curriculum</i> , which understands that: <i>Language, culture, and identity are inseparable and are learned through relationships with land, community, and lived experience.</i> Students will explore how reconciliation requires restoring language, relationships, and Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing through the story of <i>How Emma Got Her Indian Name</i> .	30% total: 25% project + 5% presentation.	29 Sept 2026

Students are expected to peer-teach this project.		
Project 2 - This project examines how language, culture, and knowledge are learned through the land, using medicinal plants as a context. Students will explore how language develops through experience, observation, and relationships: knowledge is co-produced with land, community, and practice. Different curricular frameworks shape what is recognized as “learning.” This project is grounded in the understanding that land is a teacher, and language emerges through relationships with place. Students are expected to peer-teach this project.	30% total: 25% project + 5% presentati on	27 Oct 2026
Project 3 – Integrating Language, Land, Story, and Cultural Literacy – Using <i>The Seven Stars or the Big-Headed Star Man</i> (Frank Smith, in <i>My Old People’s Stories</i>). Students will work in groups and will select ONE of the following focus areas as the foundation of their project: <i>Language, culture, and identity are interconnected; Story functions as a system of teaching and knowledge transmission; Land acts as a teacher and source of meaning; and Knowledge is co-produced through relationships with land, community, and lived experience.</i> This project is grounded in the understanding that story is not simply something we read—it is a way of learning, remembering, relating, and carrying knowledge forward. Students are expected to peer-teach this project.	30% total: 25% project + 5% presentati on	1 Dec 2026
Total		100

Participation – Working and Contributing to Your Group (10%)

Students are expected to actively contribute to group learning through participation in in-class activities, group Zoom meetings, discussions, and collaborative assignment development. This component emphasizes relational learning, respectful engagement, and researching local culture and community connections as part of co-produced knowledge processes.

Project 1 – Truth and Reconciliation and the Our Languages Curriculum (25% + 5% Presentation)

Using *How Emma Got Her Indian Name* as a foundational story, students will critically examine Truth and Reconciliation through the principles of the *Our Languages Curriculum*. This curriculum recognizes that language, culture, identity, and worldview are inseparable and are learned through relationships with family, community, land, and lived experience.

Students will explore how Indigenous languages carry knowledge, values, histories, and ways of understanding the world. Through their analysis of Emma’s story, students will consider how colonial policies disrupted Indigenous languages, identities, and relationships, and how

reconciliation involves supporting Indigenous language revitalization, cultural continuity, and the restoration of respectful relationships.

Drawing on course readings, class discussions, and local Indigenous perspectives, students will examine the role of language in shaping identity, belonging, and community well-being. Students are encouraged to connect the “story” themes to broader conversations about Indigenous education, self-determination, language renewal, and educators' responsibilities in supporting reconciliation.

The project should demonstrate an understanding that Indigenous language learning extends beyond vocabulary acquisition and is grounded in relationships, place, culture, and community. Students will also reflect on how schools can contribute to language revitalization and support Indigenous ways of knowing, being, doing, and belonging.

Students will complete a collaborative project worth 25% of the final grade and share their learning through a peer-teaching presentation worth 5%, designed to engage classmates in discussion and reflection on the relationship between language, identity, and reconciliation.

Project 2 – Language, Land, and Medicinal Plant Knowledge (25% + 5% Presentation)

Students will examine how language, culture, and knowledge are learned through relationships with the land, community, Elders, and lived experience. Drawing upon the principles of *Dene Kede*, students will explore medicinal plants as a context for understanding that land is a teacher and that knowledge is co-produced through observation, practice, storytelling, language, and intergenerational relationships.

Working collaboratively, students will investigate a medicinal plant or group of medicinal plants relevant to a Yukon First Nation, Dene, or another Indigenous context. Students should consider the relationships, responsibilities, teachings, language, stories, protocols, and values connected to the plant(s), as well as their significance to community well-being and cultural continuity.

Projects should demonstrate an understanding that Indigenous knowledge is holistic and relational, recognizing the interconnectedness of land, language, culture, spirituality, community, and health. Students are encouraged to draw connections between traditional and contemporary understandings of healing, stewardship, sustainability, and Indigenous knowledge systems.

Through this project, students will explore how relationships with land foster cultural, ecological, linguistic, and community literacy while supporting the continuity of knowledge across generations.

The final project may take the form of a visual display, a digital presentation, a teaching resource, a land-based learning activity, or another format approved by the instructor.

As part of the project, students will facilitate a peer-teaching presentation that shares their learning with the class. Presentations should engage peers in discussion and highlight how medicinal plant knowledge reflects broader Indigenous understandings of education, relationships, responsibility, and stewardship.

Project 3 – Integrating Language, Land, Story, and Cultural Literacy (25% + 5% Presentation)

Using *The Seven Stars or the Big-Headed Star Man*, as retold by Frank Smith in *My Old People's Stories*, students will work collaboratively to explore how language, culture, identity, literacy, and communication are developed through relationships with land, community, story, and lived experience. Working in groups, students will select **one** of the following focus areas:

- Language, culture, and identity are interconnected.
- Story functions as a system of teaching and knowledge transmission.
- Land acts as a teacher and source of meaning.
- Knowledge is co-produced through relationships with land, community, and lived experience.

Students will investigate how their selected focus area is reflected in the story and how it connects to the principles of the *Our Languages Curriculum*. Through their inquiry, students will examine how culture informs learning; how literacy, communication, and language acquisition develop within community and cultural contexts; and how Indigenous stories transmit knowledge across generations.

The project should draw on course readings, class discussions, and community-based perspectives. Students are encouraged to consider the impacts of colonialism on Indigenous languages, stories, and knowledge systems, and to explore how language revitalization and cultural renewal contribute to restoring relationships among language, culture, land, and community.

Groups will demonstrate how culturally relevant and culturally rich approaches to language learning support identity, belonging, communication, and knowledge transmission. Particular attention should be given to how Indigenous stories challenge assumptions about whose languages, literacies, and knowledge systems have traditionally been privileged within formal education.

COURSE WITHDRAWAL INFORMATION

Refer to the YukonU website for important dates.

TEXTBOOKS & LEARNING MATERIALS

Government of Northwest Territories. (1993). Dene Kede, Education: A Dene Perspective. Retrieve from

<https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/en/services/jk-12-school-curriculum/dene-kede-and-inuuqatigiit>

Government of Northwest Territories (Fall, 2020). Our Languages Curriculum (OLC) and Program of Study. Retrieved from <https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/en/services/indigenous-languages-and-education-secretariat/our-languages-curriculum>

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students are expected to contribute to a positive and supportive environment and are required to conduct themselves responsibly. Academic misconduct includes all forms of academic dishonesty such as cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, fraud, deceit, using the work of others without their permission, aiding other students in committing academic offenses, misrepresenting academic assignments prepared by others as one's own, or any other forms of academic dishonesty including falsification of any information on any Yukon University document.

Please refer to Academic Regulations & Procedures for further details about academic standing and student rights and responsibilities.

ACCESSIBILITY AND ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION

Yukon University is committed to providing a positive, supportive, and barrier-free academic environment for all its students. Students experiencing barriers to full participation due to a visible or hidden disability (including hearing, vision, mobility, learning disability, mental health, chronic or temporary medical condition), should contact [Accessibility Services](#) for resources or to arrange academic accommodations: access@yukonu.ca.

TOPIC OUTLINE

Culture, language, literacy

What are culture, language, and literacy?

What is Indigenous education, and what is Western education? How does the incorporation and perpetuation of a paradigm impact how and what we teach and what our students learn?

The state of Indigenous language and culture

Timeline of contact and colonization

Perseverance

Calls to Action

Truth and Reconciliation

Resilience – Indigenous knowledge, research, and methods

Worldview & Bias

How is language acquisition culturally biased and informed?

How can we best teach a culture that is not our own?

Together we can heal.

Place-based education

The role of food in reconciliation